

What's There to Fear from a Crisis Anyway?

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The integration of knowledge is a major challenge of our day. Specialization of academic disciplines has rendered it impossible for men and women to attain the rounded and balanced knowledge of the world that is the professed goal of all programs of liberal education. Refinement of method, fragmentation of problem, precious and esoteric terminology have made communication difficult between scholars even in related disciplines....In this confusion folklore should be able to make an effective contribution toward the integration of knowledge.

-M. J. Herskovits

This is an essay that did not need to be written. I think it would make better conversation than a *Forum* piece, but the editors had been quite generous to me and I felt obliged to respond. Being poor, writing seemed the best solution at the time. But as we all know, in folklore monologue is insufficient, like scholars who do not check references. Now, with this prelude performed, let us follow together the trail of an issue quite significant to us graduate students of folklore: the idea of crisis in the discipline and our roles within it. And in doing this, let us ask ourselves again something said so much better once before: Why *do* critics periodically proclaim their helplessness or their lack of understanding (Barthes 1993 [1972]:34)?

The past year in folklore, by which I loosely mean the fallout period from the 1996 American Folklore Society (AFS) meeting in Pittsburgh to the 1997 meeting in Austin, has been one of a seemingly dire crisis of survival for our discipline as a whole. While we graduate students consider the ramifications of this crisis upon our professional lives, its effects take their toll upon us personally. But take heart. This phenomenon of crisis in folklore has a deeply historical dimension to it, if not its own traditional structure. What I intend to do here is to map out some of that history and suggest that such tension is inherent in the very nature of our discipline itself. I am not going to talk about the "future of folklore." That subject should enjoy a well-deserved rest for now. I am not going to talk about the job market. I am going to talk about theory and its place in any good crisis like the one we currently enjoy in folklore. And I hope to demonstrate that we younger folklorists have many more opportunities for scholarship than we may want to believe.

This means we graduate students should not put our heads in the sand and wait out the storm or simply rely upon our professors to solve something that we have a share in; quite the contrary, we must take into account the current—and indeed serious—national climate and respond accordingly, to the best of our abilities in judgment at this time. I think it does mean that our activism should bear a certain sobriety, namely serious scholarship directed at significant topics. Of course this is nothing new. But what this objective entails is a difficult issue, one which we each must address as we balance our theory and our practice of folklore. In my own attempt to work out these issues and my relationship with the discipline I love, I have found and now offer the following items for consideration by my peers. First, a caveat. There are many issues here, and I do not want to oversimplify matters.

An Historical Survey of a Noble Crisis

The quote by Melville Herskovits that raises the curtain on this essay is compelling, indeed encouraging and perhaps even beautiful (1951:129). It was written in 1951, nearly fifty years ago. To put it in its proper perspective, that's two years after Stith Thompson, as graduate dean, instituted the folklore program here at Indiana and two years before the first American Ph.D. in folklore was awarded.¹ This sentiment of expectation runs deep, and as I intend to illustrate, it accompanies the crisis in folklore which has likely been present since Thompson's first meeting with Chancellor Wells.² If we need a myth of origin to accompany any current eschatology—or is it escapology?—these two entities, expectation and crisis, serve very well as our Divine Twins, one from fire, one from ice.

Our trail begins here, in history, as does our trial. Time and time again in this history, folklorists will "have a real opportunity if they will but make their voice heard" (Herskovits 1951:129). One of the key issues in the discussion of folklore's academic relevance is the role played by theory in the discipline. It is theory, and postmodernism in particular, which I ask my fellow graduate students to address with me in the pages that follow. Before proceeding, perhaps we should follow this trail of bread crumbs into the woods; certainly they have been left for a reason by those who came before us.

The first major crisis of folklore as we know it surrounded its very creation as an academic discipline just about mid-century in the United States. Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt (1988) has written a comprehensive study of the antagonism between the so-called anthropological and literary folklorists as it shaped the creation of folklore as a discipline, so I have little to add here.³ Francis Lee Utley's Presidential Address to AFS in 1951 provides an encapsulation of this dissension and offers some real gems for our glimpse into the historical roots of an on-going crisis.⁴ Against the "disintegrative

quarrels which make [AFS] function at only a small fraction of its potential" (1952:111), Utley argued in favor of tighter organization, which could come in a variety of ways (117–18). He warned his colleagues that "if we fail to heed some of these danger signals the flood may be upon us" (118). The stakes were very clear: "For we are saving remnants of our study, and what we do not save by ingenuity, and courtesy, and wisdom, will perish like antediluvian civilization" (119).

Read against this backdrop, Herskovits's complete one-page editorial provides an extremely interesting historical point of entry for our dialogue. For although the crisis of folklore in the 1990s is in many ways quite unlike the crisis in the 1950s—especially with respect to the rhetoric, certain ways of framing the problems have continued without interruption for nearly five decades. Herskovits's response, which lauds folklore for "always [being] integrative in its approach to data" and which praises its transdisciplinary nature inherent in its concern for "the creative life of peoples" (1951:129), would not seem antiquated in today's light. I believe there is a very significant reason for this, part of the undulating pattern of crisis and confirmation in our discipline.

In 1957, Richard Dorson found the discipline, whose reins he had recently received, in "a helter-skelter domain" (1959:197), in his opinion bound by seven types of theoretical approaches to folklore, all of which fell short in some way.⁵ In response, Dorson added an eighth, a sort-of *primus inter pares*: the theory for American folklore. In its nascent state it resembled folklore mixed with American history, and its purpose was to aid folklore students in their quest for common ground (212). At the time Herskovits saw reason for encouragement in Dorson's general comments, inasmuch as they "[recognized] the closeness of the relationship between anthropology and folklore" (216). In many ways, his excitement was premature. Subsequent appraisals of the relationship between folklore and anthropology (or other disciplines) often led Dorson to become more insular than welcoming, very much along the lines of his program of discipline building. But in the early part of folklore's establishment as a discipline, theory as we know it was limited to a few speculative methods, if embraced at all. The mood was mostly empirical, and with some good reason. As Dorson argued in his survey of 1963:

A restrained and cautious mood dominates folklore studies of the twentieth century, in reaction to wild and extravagant theories advanced by European folklorists and mythologists in the nineteenth century....Suspicion of speculative interpretations has hampered fresh flights of theory, and much energy has gone into empirical tasks of collecting and archiving and mapping the raw materials of folklore. (1963a:93)

Calling for folklorists of the future to quest for "a broadly based, pragmatic theory" (1963a:110), Dorson's 1963 appraisal suggested they may draw on the theories that he had years before only moderately supported; he called these the comparative, national, anthropological, psychoanalytic, and structural theories of folklore. In the same breath, Dorson argued for folklore's recognition as a viable discipline unto itself, claiming for it the estate of "submerged culture buried in the high civilizations" (1963b:3). Nineteen sixty-three was in many ways a pivotal year for folklore and folklore theory, and encapsulates a second major period of crisis that came in the early 1960s.

I am referring to Dorson's battle (there is no other word for it) for funding in folklore through the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), a battle that he lost. The events of this crisis may be confined for us today merely to a part of our discipline's history and to the legendary mystique of Richard Dorson, but under close analysis, the language involved in this crisis may sound hauntingly familiar.

Stated briefly, Dorson had secured soft-money grants in 1960 and 1961 from the NDEA in order to fund graduate student fellowships at Indiana University. Soon thereafter, as Dorson himself viewed it in retrospect, "the *Wall Street Journal* and the Congress of the United States began taking pot shots at federal grants for national defense to subjects like folklore, church music, and ceramics, and eventually, despite letters I wrote senators and congressmen, Congress struck out folklore under the revised bill" (1973:193).⁶ Dorson described the attack upon folklore in this manner:

For the past two years the subject of folklore has been ridiculed by journalists and by legislators responsive to them, who have seen in the grants made to folklore programs an opportunity to discredit the National Defense Act of 1958. In 1960 the weekly newsletter *Human Events* and in 1961 the *Wall Street Journal* originated criticisms of the awards to folklore, which were repeated on the editorial pages of a number of newspapers, including the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Indianapolis Star* and the *Columbus (Ohio) Evening Dispatch*. (1962:160)

Sound familiar?

Dorson's letter to Senator Morse is itself a work of touchy historical significance, one that I am somewhat unwilling to interpret. For his argument in favor of the discipline lies essentially on the idea that the Communists in the Soviet Union and Asia were using folklore as an ideological weapon, and thus the United States must train folklorists to counter and critique their enemy counterparts. Abolishing support to folklore programs would be "playing into the hands of the Communists" (Dorson 1962:161). You may be happy to know that according to Dorson's argument, our folklore (that is, the folklore of democracies) is assuredly not used as propaganda, but only for knowledge and insight (163).

From my comfortable vantage point three and a half decades later, I am simply dumbfounded by Dorson's arguments in favor of folklore, and I suspect graduate students in my generation may react with similar astonishment. In all fairness, Dorson's rhetoric was not unlike that of so many politicians and intellectuals at the time regardless of their conservatism or liberalism, not the least of whom was President Kennedy. In other words, I think it would be inappropriate to judge Dorson's arguments in this context through present political discourse. Leaving that aside, I find it intriguing that the journalistic-political front which we face today bears such resemblance to that in the 1960s. Whether we would agree today with Dorson's response, that "it seems incredible that a Senate subcommittee should be guided by the remarks of a journalist in formulating policies for national defense and education" (164), is perhaps the lesser question at stake. By no means am I suggesting that our present situation is merely a repeat pattern of the situation back then, and perhaps there is very little pleasure to take even in recognizing the company, but I do want to demonstrate that this situation—this very real sense of crisis—is something that has been with us for a long time, and will likely remain. How we approach it will be our unique contribution to our discipline, but I think it is important to pay close attention to the ways the successful members of the previous generation went about their business. And in academia in general and folklore in particular, the strategy in the later 1960s turned upon theoretical sophistication.

As the 1989 issue of the *Journal of American Folklore* edited by Robert Georges indicates, so much of what Dorson regarded as folklore "theory" was really attention to folklore methods and perceptions. Dorson's own method of surveying theories speaks volumes to this point, and may seem to us graduate students today to possess almost a naïveté about it. We will need to reconsider this position, if indeed it is our own, when we come to address the way postmodernism has changed the habits we young academics must follow, but let us for now continue on our trail. For by 1969, perhaps with the sting of the NDEA having passed, Dorson willingly clarified his position on theory: his objection was only to "irrelevant theory," by which he meant those that did not adequately address American folklore (1971:61).

I have paid particular attention to Dorson's activities for two reasons. First, it was Dorson who saw to the establishment of an independent program in folklore at Indiana University and who guided it and its theoretical perspectives for several decades. Second, I think I speak reasonably when I assert that many of us graduate students today need to figure out how to place Dorson's involvement (and his tactics) in the establishment of folklore and his role in the crises which took shape in the early 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. For we graduate students who did not live—or perhaps were not even born—in the 1960s are those who knew not Dorson, the man who was

"two men."⁷ This issue raises several questions for us, especially here at Indiana University. I'll be the first to admit that I simply cannot get a good read from my teachers on Dorson, and my own piecemeal walk through the woods is often made stumbling. On one hand, I know he was a man who longed for a good fight.⁸ I have heard of the great boxing-matches: Dorson vs. Botkin, Dorson vs. Bidney, Dorson vs. Bascom. I know the first judgments of those matches (most of them pronounced by Dorson himself), and the recent revisions which have cast doubt upon the sport. On the other hand, Indiana's program is standing while the others, I am told by unsubstantiated rumor, are shaking at the roots. Put simply, let us consider his use of insularity to build a power base—did maneuvers like these save folklore or ultimately condemn it? How do you best assess the activities of someone who used the walls of a discipline to such a degree, and is there a lesson to be learned for today?⁹

To be fair, the 1960s were certainly not Dorson's arena alone. Nor were the changes in theoretical perspectives solely centered in folklore. Across Euro-American academia, "the emergence of theory in the 1960s breached the disciplinary fortifications between literary texts and texts derived from other discourses, such as the linguistic, the psychoanalytic, the philosophical" (Guillory 1993:176). As Elizabeth Bruss eloquently described it in her marvelous study *Beautiful Theories*, "It was late in the 1960s when the symptoms, heretofore fugitive and for the most part manageable, could no longer be ignored" (1982:3). Those symptoms signified a possession of the Anglo-American academy "by an alien spirit of speculation, infected by an unspeakable cant of theoretical abstractions" (3), in short, "Suddenly, an Age of Theory" (1).¹⁰

The spirit's reach was felt across the academic landscape. Alan Dundes, taking his Ph.D. in the early part of the decade, at once both lamented that "very few important original theoretical works in folklore have been penned by American folklore scholars" (1966a:239), and recognized great promise in the changing American concept of folklore (245). Critiques of folkloric methodology followed (e.g., Ben-Amos 1969), and with them an emphasis on communication and performance. While most of us graduate students were busy being born, the contextualist "revolution" rose up, reflected, and responded in full to the crisis of the 1960s and 1970s.

It is in the literature of the 1970s that the crisis in folklore is first linked closely to theory. The 1950s were largely a period of establishment, and the crisis then centered around the struggle for legitimacy. This crisis lingered to some degree in the academy vs. media arguments in the 1960s, when new theoretical methods began to develop and when calls for greater theoretical sophistication began in earnest. The turn in the 1970s is one that we graduate students of the 1990s may understand very well because of its extremely contemporary ring. Dorson framed it best:

We have reached a crucial point in the history of folklore studies in the United States. The entire academic scene is under scrutiny and review....Programs and departments considered peripheral are, as we all know, being eliminated; budget belts for faculty positions are being tightened; Ph.D.'s are seeking ever more elusive jobs....What are the prospects for Folklore, which by 1971 has inched its way into the tent of academe but could easily be pushed out again? (1972:105)

Dorson's answer, of course, was "to fight unequivocally for continued academic recognition" (105), that meant at times criticizing folklorists and non-folklorists who essentially did not toe the line (106), using "the walls between disciplines...for us" (107), and employing one's personal initiative—that is, quite simply, playing the game—to keep folklore programs alive (108). We students today may be a little unnerved at the frankness of Dorson's comments about discipline building and the seeming ease with which he made them, and I think it is no stretch to admit that statements like these confuse our already imperfect picture of him and the state of folklore that his successors inherited. Responses to Dorson at that time do not necessarily clarify the picture for me,¹¹ and the message of his politics remains murky. What are we to do, for example, with such assessments as George Carey's:

I have never doubted Richard Dorson's ability to "get it all together" as the modern folk might say. He's been doing it for years in books, articles, diatribes to the Feds, harangues to the phonies. And now, on top of all this comes his battle cry to the American Folklore Society: "Mount the siege of academe, folklorist, you have nothing to lose but your discipline!" (1972:115)

Leaving aside these martial metaphors ascribed to Dorson, I think what is most important to notice is that the problem in 1972 was much like the one we face today, twenty-five years later. Dorson's assessment of 1972 would stand well for many of us now, no doubt, and in charting out these issues I do not wish to be pessimistic but to illustrate a point about crises in academia. For soon after this presentation to AFS,¹² Dorson would look back at the 1957 meeting and reopen the question of folklore's status as a discipline, both in a pragmatic and philosophical sense (1973:177). His response should come as no surprise, and I will leave it to my fellow graduate students to debate the virtues of his call for a "power base and intellectual base" necessary for folklore's survival (178).

Survival is the key word, because he saw 1973 as "the crest of the wave for the folklore boom, and from now on for the foreseeable future the battle must be a holding operation" (195).¹³ In the shadow of this grim situation, Dorson turned to an issue no doubt of interest to us who scan the same woods right now:

A third point deals with the *raison d'être* of all this academic infighting: the students....Each new Ph.D. in folklore adds another crusader for the cause, another professional to tilt the balance against the dilettantes. It is the students who will debate the issues, write the new books, and in their turn teach the next generation. (1972:196)

Those willing to accept this martial metaphor will be pleased to know that Dorson recognized *Folklore Forum* as one of the best weapons in the legion's arsenal. And two and a half decades later, the next generation has indeed arrived.

Of course, folklore survived the crisis in academia of the 1970s. How it did so has already been addressed by those who were there, and it will no doubt be revised by those of us who weren't when we heroize our own rise someday. But here is where I think we must pay closest attention to the changes that occurred, for in them we may glimpse a reflection of our own potential for success. And the success of our discipline is the heart of this essay, however many views we each may share on it. To answer it for myself, I turn to those who made their success in the face of that earlier crisis, both the "young Turks" (I promise I shall not use that term again) and the multitude of other voices coming of age at that time.

It is true, I think, to assert that there was no new Dorson among them. Let us not be discouraged. Despite our—or at least my—confusion about what Dorson's tactics meant for the survival of folklore at the university level, I am thankful that the turn that followed him was one against insularity for folklore as a discipline. Dorson's politics did not go uncriticized even in his own time, but the success of the criticism has yet to be addressed in revisions of the history of folklore.¹⁴

I also think that despite certain modest claims to the contrary by those who composed it, *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore* did have a significant impact on the field, if not in its immediate reception then certainly on our generation's perspective on the changes in our discipline. For me, it is most interesting to locate the book's position within the 1970s version of the crisis of the discipline. Américo Paredes's comments in the foreword are illuminating, because they turn on an issue that will also seem rather comfortably contemporary, not unlike Dorson's comments on the status of the discipline in 1972. Paredes wrote:

Our work was guided by a conviction that there is a great deal more theoretical activity going on in the United States than we are given credit for by folklorists abroad, and by ourselves as well. It is true that we still have among us some who do not believe in theory, and who of course do their work on the basis of unstated and unrecognized assumptions....Many of our theoretical confusions arise from the fact that we cannot agree on the definition of basic terms; and we, therefore,

often find it difficult to talk to each other. This, more than broad theoretical concepts, has been the cause of many of our disagreements. (1972:ix-x)

Several other publications of the early 1970s echo similar arguments. In a perhaps now overlooked but extremely interesting collection of articles by then graduate students and recent Ph.D.'s¹⁵ from all degree-granting institutions, *Folklore Forum* published a special issue on theoretical concepts important to folklorists. Its editor, Gerald Cashion, introduced the work:

The germ of the idea that resulted in this collection of articles came from my feeling that too often we attack problems in our study of folklore without having first provided the solid theoretical or conceptual foundations necessary for legitimate research. Too often we attempt to communicate with each other from dissimilar conceptual frameworks. The result is non-communication. What we need, as Thomas Kuhn has pointed out is necessary for all disciplines, is a solid metalanguage. (1974:i)

Eddie Bullard, one of the contributors, stated a similar theme:

A perennial problem of folklore concerns the search for method. While folklore study has managed to amass considerable quantities of data, folkloristic science has usually failed to apply any consistent approaches to the organization of this data. In short, folklore as a science is still in its infancy. An understanding of the nature of theory, in the particular and rigorous form that theoretical expressions take in the sciences, is useful to the folklorist. (1974:18)

In many ways, if agreement on theoretical terms and possible sophistication was lacking from folklore prior to the 1970s, not everyone saw it as reason for alarm. That is, the lack of theory was never regarded as a cause for that early crisis, and calls to tighten up definitions were often posed as solutions to the academic status problems which folklore then faced. Dell Hymes, in the Presidential Address delivered at AFS in 1974, while calling for folklore to "advance a general conception of itself" in order to "attract a larger proportion of those who already deal with its own proper subject-matter, and claim a place for itself as an integral part of any scheme of the humanities and sciences" (1975:347) and while offering five key notions around which the general conception could be built,¹⁶ saw in folklore a very positive and distinctive feature largely left uncelebrated: "a concern for accuracy and objectivity, insight and explanation, that manages by and large not to contort what one studies with procrustean methodology, or to conceal it behind a mask of theoretics" (345).

In this, a call against a mask of theoretics, Hymes alerted us to an important notion: folklore and folklorists, as those who strive to balance theory and practice, serve well as mediators between academia and the rest of the world. It is true, Hymes set these in a Presidential Address and his words of encouragement must be read within that context, but nevertheless his words were timely for the crisis at hand. His sentiment would be echoed many times throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. That is, it was not necessarily a question of theory alone saving a discipline in crisis, but of theory properly balanced with folklore's methods and materials that would keep the discipline viable, if not flourishing. In an alternative interpretation, Hymes's claims function precisely as a Presidential Address should—to encourage an optimism that inspires scholarship. We today cannot underestimate the importance of this type of optimistic language, especially when so many of us spend several minutes a day deleting from our email lists the prattle of complaints by our fellow graduate students regarding folklore's immanent demise or the people out there who think poorly of us.

Neither Hymes nor any of those calling for sharper theoretical definition could have predicted the way the academic world was turning—perhaps twisting—into the world we know today. In discussing this thorny aspect of a graduate student's situation in contemporary academia, let me accuse myself before anyone else gets around to it: as a member of this generation and this world, I realize I am dangerously limited by my own perspectives and by my own ideologies. As one scholar reviewing Pierre Bourdieu's work has noted, those of us who participate in an academic subculture face "the power of self-deception within the guild" (Simpson 1995:13),¹⁷ and this self-deception often metamorphoses into a dull self-seriousness. Having admitted as much certainly does not get me off the hook, but I hope it alerts all of us who are studying folklore today and its present situation within academia to consider our construction of ourselves in the postmodern world (itself a construct) both seriously *and* humorously, and perhaps ultimately, ironically.

Let's frame it this way: within five years of the publication of *Toward New Perspectives*, the importance of theory in folklore had taken a significant turn into the limelight. But even then the implications of theory as a response to crisis went largely unnoticed. Thomas Burns, despite his recognition of the "enormous expansion in the past fifteen years in the scope of theoretical viewpoints that have come to be regarded as legitimate perspectives in the American study of folklore" (1977:110), nevertheless described those theories from a relatively historical perspective, and his categories of folklore theory did not deviate nor expand significantly beyond those that Dorson had mapped out in his many surveys of the field. But Burns's observation is telling: "as yet there has emerged no theory or perspective that has been able

to unify the many disparate viewpoints, past and present, that constitute the theoretical pursuits of scholars in the discipline" (110). Was he lamenting such a lack of unification? And, was this concern in response to something that had been there before, but was missing in the 1970s?

These questions lead to the shape of the crisis in folklore in the 1980s.¹⁸ In a brief essay in *New York Folklore*, Gerald Warshaver essentially claimed that "folklore" no longer existed (1981:1). Folklorists still existed, of course, and Warshaver contended that what distinguished them from other academics was not their referents (as they once did) but rather the strategies and the views folklorists employed in their work (2). Warshaver took these terms from Michel Foucault and Eugen Weber (a commentator on Marc Bloch), respectively. In retrospect, his comments were early, conscious recognitions of the way postmodernism had taken folklore by the hand. His comments did not pass without criticism.¹⁹ But if any year could symbolize a turning of the tides in folklore, perhaps 1981 is the most appropriate one, the year both Dorson and William Bascom died.²⁰

As with our own experiences, the early part of that decade witnessed a sharply reflexive turn which resulted in several conferences on "The Future of Folklore." One conference was held at Bloomington in 1982 on this theme, as was one in 1983 at the Middle Atlantic Folklife Association Annual Meeting. Several journals of the early 1980s are replete with papers given at these conferences, and many of the participants recognized this introspection and those which preceded it as "[signs] of maturing scholarship" (Bronner 1983:1). Assessments of the academic status of folklore in the 1980s was not unlike those of earlier decades. As Simon Bronner outlined:

The eighties gave signs of being more difficult times for growth and employment in the profession. The face of the discipline had changed. The academy, no longer hegemonic, shared the day with the "public sector" and "applied field" for the study and presentation of folklore. Bold theories and methods introduced in the 60s and expanded in the 70s needed rethinking in the 80s. (1)

The comments made by the six scholars at the Bloomington Conference are too rich in implications to do justice to them in a survey such as this. I recommend them highly to my fellow graduate students (and in doing so direct them to this fine journal, which published them). A few enticements will suffice. First, Henry Glassie described the state of folklore not unlike Bronner, but with a particularly refreshing twist:

Hope seems an odd, anachronistic word to use today. Hard times, we are told, grip us. These are days for restraint, retrenching, and complaint. Yes this is a time of unbelievable prosperity....Despite the

hardships of many of the people we must champion, these are boom times for our discipline. It should be a time for brave, critical scholarship. Despite the times and the multitudinous signs of cowardice around me, I am optimistic and I wish to appraise our condition and then consider our future in a hopeful mood. (1983:123)

And that is only the beginning. What follows is a call for action, both in scholarship and in politics, through which folklorists could confidently breach the artificial barriers between Ivory Tower and the people, who really matter. A discussion on the importance of a continuous argument over the definition of folklore (one geared with particular sensitivity to generational lines) and a frank appraisal of nonsensical academic abstraction ensue, culminating in an analysis of the nature of theory in folklore and the pursuit of truth across disciplinary lines. The entire movement is couched within a crisis of morality at the heart of folklore's identity.²¹

And then we reach the second article.

With respect to the topic at hand in this essay, Alan Jabbour's contribution bears significance (1983). Jabbour presented an analysis of the future of American folklore based on its traditional tensions, of which he numbered five. In order, they are dilemmas regarding (1) text/context, (2) past/present, (3) disciplinarity/interdisciplinarity, (4) us vs. other, and (5) study vs. action. Jabbour saw in these polar opposites a tension that fuels the very discipline itself, and that perpetuates scholarship as the pendulum swings back and forth. His analysis is not unlike Dorson's earlier argument, seeing a "Hegelian synthesis" at work as new interests or theories in folklore interacted with older models (1982:72); the uniqueness in Jabbour's suggestion lies in its being an early analysis of folklore as a dialectical creature, that revolves in some type of cycle around recurring academic themes. It should come as no surprise that I would add the crisis in folklore to this list of patterned dilemmas, if not alone then in opposition to calls for folklore's viability, usually through new theoretical perspectives.

In his contribution, Richard Bauman diagnosed the crisis in folklore as becoming increasingly acute since World War II when "technological change, the mass media, popular culture, literacy, formal education, and tourists" had increasingly shaken the original concept of folk culture (1983a:154). In response to this sense of crisis, folklorists generally took one of two responses: "a retreat into tradition and homogeneity" (that is, essentially, romantic nostalgia) or an attempt "to confront the processes and effects of modernity head on," usually through a "surrender to pop culture" (154). Much more difficult, Bauman argued, is a third response, "the effort to really comprehend what modernity means and to see what genuine expressive and esthetic responses emerge to deal with it" (155).

Bauman's comments, both on the nature of the crisis and the two types of responses to it, fit comfortably with our present situation; they are as descriptive of today's situation as they were a decade and a half ago, although I suspect most of us in our generation (myself included) tend to choose the second option as a response. If that is the case, then we may need to take Bauman's—and indeed also Glassie's—suggestions about modernity more closely into account, however problematic they may be for our own sense of identity in this generation (a subject I will discuss in another section). In many ways the issue of modernity has remained at the forefront of folkloristic discourse since that conference in the early 1980s, but not necessarily in the same way it was framed back then, for the real fervor of postmodern theory within the academy had yet to stake a claim in folklore.

Postmodernism as an entity in itself soon became an important issue for folklorists in the late 1980s.²² In 1989 Mark Workman published one of the earliest—if not the earliest—articles that frame folkloric issues through the literature of postmodernism, "Folklore in the Wilderness: Folklore and Postmodernism." Therein he did not address the general relationship between folklore and postmodernism, but rather described the ways in which Bauman's *Verbal Art as Performance* (1977) and its call for emphasis on emergence opened the door for the discipline's entrance into postmodernism, a door which could from then on no longer be closed. With this, Workman heralded the seemingly oxymoronic idea of "postmodern folklore" and to his own question of what folklore's place in the postmodern world was, he answered:

It was [Richard Bauman], after all, who proposed to initiate a folkloristics which is forward-looking and capable of embracing more of the totality of human experience. There is nothing wrong with being Janus-faced, it seems to me, as long as we do not look further behind us than we are willing to look before us. Postmodern literature is a significant part of contemporary expression, serving, among other things, as a repository for defunct folklore; and temporal and spatial rupture are significant features of contemporary existence. Thus, to fulfill Bauman's program, we must take account of both. (1989:9)

Workman anticipated criticism from "traditionally minded folklorists," whom he characterized as believing that "if folklore must open its doors to what appears to be its most demonic antithesis, the postmodern, then surely we have abandoned order for anarchy" (12). Indeed, the critique of postmodernism was not far behind.

The account of Henry Glassie's 1989 Presidential Address to AFS, preserved as it is in *Folklore Forum* 21 (1988),²³ is almost legendary. According to John Dorst, who shared an exchange with Glassie in the Open Forum of the journal, "Glassie enjoined his audience to forsake any

infatuation it might have with this 'foppish' palaver about postmodernism" (216); the audience responded with rounding applause. This in turn made Dorst wonder: "Had American folklorists somewhere been contemplating the array of issues associated with the term postmodernism and come to the consensus implied by their applause? Where were the discussions carried on—certainly not in the pages of familiar journals" (217).

Dorst concluded that the audience had instead responded to a "very general distaste...for excesses" (217) which characterized postmodernism. Employing a then recent distinction made by Steven Connor between *postmodernism* and *postmodernity*, Dorst suggested that folklorists tended to reject the cultural movement that the former was, but could—and indeed should—engage with the latter and its emphasis on consumer capitalism. Dorst argued that folklorists could enrich the discourse of postmodernity "by bringing to bear a sophisticated attention to ethnographic specificities in local circumstances" (219).

For his part, Glassie reiterated his position that folklore's role was properly situated within modernism, by which he meant, among other things, the "task to prevent us from closing our notion of reality down around our own predicament; folklore must struggle to keep the view global" (221–22). Glassie saw in the best modernists a concern with both the universal and the particular, and argued that the less talented of them simplified it to stress merely its universal dimension, thus provoking the particular to rebel (222). Moreover, Glassie agreed with Dorst's presentation, that the fashion of postmodernism posed a real threat to scholarship, while the details of postmodernity were able to examine folklore's existence within consumer capitalism.²⁴

In their fruitful exchange on postmodernism and folklore, Dorst and Glassie illustrated the theoretical issue that would come to play so heavily in the 1990s version of the crisis in folklore. For sure enough, the present decade began with a major discussion on the future of folklore with respect to the crisis gripping the discipline. *Western Folklore* 50/1 (1991) published a series of papers from a 1990 conference of the California Folklore Society on that very subject. In one of them, Stephen Stern suggested that one of the more important issues informing the new crisis was folklorists "coming to grips (rather late, some would argue) with the intellectual consequences of postmodernism" and its accompanying "indeterminacy, decanonization of authority, fragmentation, and hybridization" (1991:21). In particular, Stern noted that this pluralism led to a severe competition for funding, power, and control within educational institutions (23). Thus the crisis in folklore in the 1990s was viewed in many ways as a creation of postmodernism's maturation within the academy. This differs somewhat from the crisis in the previous decades, to which theory was seen largely as a response to the crisis. The issue in the early 1990s was whether too much theory—especially theory imported from other disciplines—was ultimately a bad thing for folklore.

For example, Elliott Oring saw in the maneuvers of his fellow *Western Folklore* 50 contributors a common desire to improve folklore's image and thus bring the discipline out of academic obscurity. He wondered whether folklore was alone in being overlooked (1991:77), considered the potential problems that come with folklore being too accessible to the public both inside and outside the academy,²⁵ and then cut to the heart of the matter:

One of the reasons that folklore studies do not hold a prominent place in the humanities or social sciences is that contemporary folklore studies have yet to contribute a major theoretical perspective to the study of human behavior and expression. The most penetrating insights into folklore matters are invariably imported from the outside. (78)

Oring's analysis has its precedents, of course, notably Dundes (1966a) and Burns (1977). What differs from the earlier accounts is Oring's suggestion that the "disorganization and fragmentation of the field itself" has led to the absence of original theory (1991:78). The fragmentation he had in mind concerned the lack of agreement over the central issues in the discipline, which in turn, he argued, caused a crisis in identity (78-79).

This leads us easily into the idea of retrospection, a primary tool of theoreticians in the 1990s. Twenty years after its publication, *Toward New Perspectives* was situated within an overall postmodern frame and its status was recognized as having shifted "from new and revolutionary to middle-aged" (Shuman and Briggs 1993:110) by many of the same people who contributed to the original volume. In a fascinating collection of articles published in *Western Folklore* 52/2-4 (1993) and grouped under the title "Theorizing Folklore: Toward New Perspectives on the Politics of Culture," influential folklorists addressed the many concerns brought by the rise of postmodernism in academia.²⁶ Therein, Amy Shuman and Charles Briggs (the editors of the collection) charted the reasons for the lack of a unified theory in folklore: the shift from general theories to particular problems, especially upon the (Derridean) politics of culture, the main theme of the essays collected in the special issue. As they wrote:

Many practitioners are currently voicing a sense of being lost in a theoretical quagmire. While the emphases on performance, communication, and other concepts in *TNP* do not constitute a single, unified model (nor were they intended to be read as such), they did provide a theoretical grounding for analysis and theory building. As the authority of these notions has become challenged and as scholars have focused attention on the particular problems raised in their research sites rather than on general theories, shared paradigms are less apparent. (1993:111-12)

Shuman and Briggs discussed the rise of interest during the 1980s in such concepts as nationalism, social construction, and critiques of power and knowledge, the result of which suggested a challenge to the way theory had previously been assessed in folklore. In many ways they answered the question posed earlier by Burns, and stated directly that a single dominant theoretical framework in folklore was no longer possible nor the major interest of folklorists (115).²⁷ Their conclusion to this analysis of the postmodern shift is noteworthy:

We assert that folklorists stand at a pivotal moment, not only in their own discipline but also in broader postmodern debates. In the past twenty years, folklorists have joined theorists in the humanities and the social sciences in an examination of culture. Postmodernism has helped folklorists discover its contribution to modernism, and at the same time has seen the way it can contribute to the critique of modernism by rupturing the hold of high culture. (131)

The reflexive turn central to postmodernism was the key to their interpretation and the changes in the discipline that *Toward New Perspectives* symbolized. As Roger Abrahams noted in his contribution to the *Western Folklore* 52 collection:

Folklorists, along with other members of the human disciplines, find ourselves employing our understanding of traditional performance and practice as ways of critiquing the class-, gender- and race-biased representations of all societies and cultures, especially our own. We must examine our own practices with these biases in mind, subjecting ourselves to the same scrutiny that all of the human sciences are undergoing. (1993:396)

Nevertheless, the turn to postmodernist theories was eventually recognized as an impetus for, as Robert Baron described it, “experiencing a renewed crisis about folklore’s self-definition and academic identity” (1993:242). Baron made a very interesting point in his contribution to the collection. Charting out certain factors in the notion of interdisciplinarity that changed folklore, Baron came to the same conclusion that I will ultimately suggest: the contemporary crisis in folklore “is reminiscent of the varying attitudes of folklorists during the late forties and early fifties— anxieties about the status of the field conjoined with satisfaction about a healthy pluralism or lamentations about disintegrative fragmentation, depending on your viewpoint” (242).

The 1996 volume of *The Folklore Historian* responded in full to the articles collected in *Western Folklore* 52, and I think that together the two journals represent several major debates which we graduate

students will face in the years to come. Ronald Baker, who provided the introduction to the collection in *The Folklore Historian*, framed the issue in a way that may seem reminiscent of the early 1970s:

Over the years there have been notable debates on the concept of folklore. Folklorists are interested in the definition of folklore once again because this is a time of chaos and crisis in folklore studies. Since contemporary folklorists cannot agree on purpose, alliances, and method, they cannot always follow each other's arguments and understand each other's conclusions. (1996:15)

Although Baker's call for definition and a common vocabulary may seem akin to those proposed by Paredes and Cashion in the 1970s, the conclusions of most of the contributors to *The Folklore Historian* do not follow the path taken by the most illustrious scholars of the earlier period. There is no call for a widening of theoretical perspectives per se, but a critique of the tricky places where overemphasis on theory has brought folklore. Kenneth Pimple, whose original presentation at the 1994 AFS meeting sparked the flame of this special issue, charted a pattern in folklore in which what he called the subject matter (that is, the stuff of folklore, the ballads, legends, etc.) exerts a conservative, stabilizing pull while the theoretical interpretation of the subject matter propels the discipline into new realms of discovery (1996:20). His overall assessment, based on a reading of the *Western Folklore* 52 articles, was that "theoretical concerns, at least for these authors and at least for now, apparently overwhelmed interest in the subject matter. We are in the curious position of being in a field named after a subject matter in which we are no longer interested" (21).

In one of his more musing moments, Pimple lamented that part of the contemporary problem could have been averted "if our founders had had the foresight to use some nice Greek compound to name our field, a word that, at least initially, had no vernacular meaning" (20). Here, I respectfully—and playfully—disagree with his critique. We all know the look that comes in response to "I'm a folklorist." Could you imagine what trials we would face were we to respond, "Me? I'm a demologist."

The other critiques in *The Folklore Historian* follow Pimple's lead, and cast the new crisis in a particularly inward direction, that is they considered the way folklorists do what they do, including their use of postmodern theory. Bronner, noting the ever-present idea of marginalization (both of the folk and of folklore as a discipline), reopened the question of a mission for folklore, not unlike the "singular mission that could be constructed from various perspectives" that Dorson himself outlined (1996:25). Bronner questioned why folklorists should have an identity crisis these days (26) and located the problem within folklorists themselves. That is, Bronner placed

responsibility for the perspective of marginalization and reputed inadequate respect within the academy upon folklorists, who have taken to indulge in a certain unnecessary pessimism. If we agree with Bronner and if I have successfully argued that a sense of crisis is present almost always in folklore, then we may ask why it has taken a particularly pessimistic tone in the 1990s. Could it be that our tradition is wearing thin?

In his contribution to *The Folklore Historian* (1996), Oring found “the headlong rush to new models, concerns, and vocabulary” as characterized by the *Western Folklore* 52 collection as “somewhat unseemly for a discipline that by now should have come to relish its marginal status” (1996:31). And Wolfgang Mieder offered the most eloquent explication of the issue raised by the authors in *The Folklore Historian*:

Our best critical minds should look for new theoretical frameworks. But there ought to be a caveat to this. Let us as folklore scholars be open-minded to the many ways that folklore can be studied. When we find new theories and approaches let us not automatically belittle older and established methods. An overemphasis on theory would in fact throw the baby out with the bathwater....It behooves us as folklorists not to overemphasize the theoretical side of matters at the unfortunate expense of field researchers, cataloguers, archivists, and editors of collections. (1996:33–34)

With this, we reach the end of our path, at least for now. The trail has brought us out of the woods, and there before us in the clearing is a magnificent and familiar house, made of bread, with a cake roof and windows of sugar. It is just like the house we left when we set out on our journey. Let us go nearer to see what’s inside...

Ah, screw it. Let’s charge into the woods. The wilderness is far more interesting, and maybe there things will make sense.

The Point of the Historical Survey

Histories are dangerous things. Even the sophisticated reader is never quite sure what the hidden motives of the historian are. Historical surveys are even worse. What they lack in depth they try to make up for in scope, and like a half-told fairy tale, they rarely do either well. There’s often a great deal of “writing-up” in them, which is simply intolerable. I try not to read them at all, and when I do, I try very hard to skim through them in search of a main point. Here’s mine: the crisis in folklore has been with us like a dull pattern at least as early as the establishment of folklore as an academic discipline in the late 1940s. The eleventh hour is always with us, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has recently said (1996:249).²⁸ Perhaps we folklorists-in-training should be more aware of these patterns, and in doing so not worry

as much about the job market but rather turn to the changes in scholarship we can affect, or as Wayland Hand once asked, "Why should we be so defensive about our discipline, and why should we be so self-effacing" (1960:9)? For in the past fifty years, every decade (if not every year) in folklore has recognized a major crisis of academic relevancy and identity, and the issue of theory has been at the center of the discussion, although for different reasons in different decades.

In a sense, what we have been following through these five decades is a trail of rehearsals, the sorting out of issues that I suspect goes on every time a new wave of scholars realizes the magnitude of the commitment they have undertaken. By these comments I do not mean to trivialize the reality of real crises we face, but to suggest that they are a constant part of our work as folklorists, have always been so, and will likely always be so. The solutions may lie, therefore, not so much in solving or even defining the crisis anew time and time again, but rather in recognizing the historical dimension to it and thereby not dwelling upon it for very long.²⁹ We younger scholars can, I believe, save our efforts for better things if we do not concentrate on something that seems both new and, to be quite honest, actually solvable, when it is likely neither.

In my account, I have also not addressed the idea of a changing of the guard, those periods of retirement *en masse* when supposedly the students become the major players within a short period of time. I have not examined this angle because I am not certain the model holds, and do not know how to test the hypothesis to a satisfactory end. Besides, I think the idea of a "revolution" in folklore doesn't need a body count. What it does need is for us to get to work on the scholarship, rather than dwell on what seems to be a brand new crisis each year or with each new email cycle of complaints. As I will soon articulate in more detail, I also contend that an adequate and well-earned response to the question of scholarship and to the theoretical ideas our generation wants to deal with in relation to what has already been done is by far more profitable than yet another graduate student meeting about the future of folklore, how to save folklore, why to study folklore, what to do with folklore, and all the other convenient packages wrapped in their well meaning titles.

What I am saying is by no means unique, but it does bring with it a host of questions we must honestly address. Here it is best to turn to our teachers. For example, in his contribution to a recent special issue of the *Journal of Folklore Research* on Folklore in the Academy, Bauman offered this advice:

I believe that the great strength of folklore at its best lies in the principled upholding of the transdisciplinary, integrative perspective that comprehends human expression, society, culture, history and politics within a unified frame of reference. (1996:15)

It echoes a statement he made in his introduction to *Toward New Perspectives*, almost 25 years earlier (and of greater significance, it echoes the statement of Herskovits which opens this essay).³⁰ Having noted that folklore as a discipline often oscillates between domination by one theory or method and times when it makes more sense to identify several theories informing the discipline, Bauman suggested in 1972:

The present collection attains what may be its principle significance, that of representing a new generation of folklorists who are decidedly not content to remain within the confines of inherited intellectual pigeonholes, but who combine freely and as a matter of course features of all these approaches in a common commitment to illuminating the expressive behavior of man. The writers share a view of the past that combines a willingness to build upon the productive contributions of their elders with a salutary unwillingness to be bound by the constraints of academic and intellectual compartmentalization. (1972:xv)

Integrative work, then, is the consistent and central idea of folklore's survival, regardless of how the crisis is operating in any given year. Glassie's argument about modernism and postmodernism cited above is, in my opinion, the same type of call for truly integrative scholarship, and that is why I think his critique is so important for us to consider. Other disciplines gripped with postmodernism may or may not grapple with this issue of balance between the universal and the particular, and to be honest, this is probably a good card for us to have in our hand. The best thing about folklore, everyone agrees, is that when done well it engages all of these levels of interpretation and scope. Let us as graduate students then capitalize on this point, that our teachers agree upon despite their divergent scholarly interests.

Yes, let's also admit it. It's easier said than done. In response, I think we need to consider the nature of truly integrative work. As a graduate student in folklore, a part of me desperately wants to believe that the walls of this discipline will hold, not unlike Dorson's power base did for so long. As a folklorist, I readily understand the persuasive power of belief, and I must be careful not to see what I want to believe. On the other side, I also understand that not only is such a view of an entrenched power base unrealistic, but in fact short-sighted. Were it not for the changes toward transdisciplinarity that occurred in folklore in the 1970s, I would not be here studying folklore. It's likely most of us would not. And this brings us to the discussion of the many disciplines which relate to and inform our own and which we inform in return. Think of it this way: how many of us noted a desire to do transdisciplinary work on our applications to graduate school? How many of us addressed the need in our scholarship to go beyond the walls of one single discipline?³¹

Consider the way we frame the debate between emphasis on the materials of folklore (the lore) and interpretations (the theory), a problem not unlike the text/context controversy. We all speak of the ideal balance, but achieving it is another thing altogether. The rhetoric of crisis can often turn a material/interpretation dialectic into a real and unfortunate schism. I think that's what we're seeing today. And I think it is often difficult these days not to equate the theorists with the transdisciplinary and the materialists (if I may respectfully call them so) with the border-drawers. But this binary opposition, however convenient for our rhetorical gains, neither adequately describes the reality of the situation nor in fact gets us anywhere. How then does one break from its seductive ease and hold to a more realistic and productive model of our activity? Here, I think it is profitable for us younger folklorists to articulate as clearly as possible our idea of integrative scholarship and the opportunities which could follow for our community. I hope to do that—far more briefly, I assure you—in the remainder of this essay. What I want to suggest is that in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, truly integrative work depends upon sophisticated handling of some truly complex theoretical ideas and a meticulous concern with what theories are useful to the interpretation of the folkloric phenomenon. But let us also agree with Hasan El-Shamy, who has passionately argued that if the data we collect—and for us folklorists that means the experiences people share with us, their lore in which human behavior is codified—contradicts the theory we are interested in testing, then the theory has to go. Otherwise, we run a great risk of creating a “folk” who do not exist, and do so for the sole purpose of theory for theory's sake. We must accept, as El-Shamy has said, data both “glorious and inglorious,” and not simply impose theory upon it.³²

Who Really Needs A Unified Theory These Days?

Right off the bat, I'm going to admit that I think it's foolish to try and avoid postmodernism and the implications it raises for us graduate students of folklore. Moreover, I could not for the life of me think of why anyone would want to avoid such exciting and important aspects of contemporary society. I realize that our discipline is probably the best shelter for scholars who want to operate within an anti-postmodernist system, but I think that it's important for us to address those issues in some way, even if in earnest opposition. And by important, I do mean both scholarly and ethically—that our epistemologies greatly influence our moralities and vice versa (I use these terms in the Deleuzian sense), and thus our critiques are of primary political importance. At stake is what Althusser meant when he said that the most anti-humanist stand was necessary to foster humanism.³³

What we need, I believe, are the means to engage headlong with those issues, although not just for the sake of situating ourselves in relationship to postmodernism *qua* postmodernism. This may seem to suggest that I am praising the theory instead of—or at the expense of—the stuff of folklore. Nothing is further from the truth. Rather, I would hope we frame this issue of theory the way the contextualists framed their relationship to the text.³⁴ That is, the text remains as a viable, live source of energy—primal energy, if you will; properly applied theory accompanies it and fuels our discussions with each other.

What I do mean, at least on the practical level, is that we need to consider those issues significant enough to get us published in the important journals, both inside and outside folklore.³⁵ If you look at the contextualist “revolution,” for example, things did not happen overnight. If it was a revolution, there was no *coup d'état*, and no one recognizes this more clearly than those revolutionaries themselves.³⁶ In other words, while we don't need to feel rushed, I do think that together we have to look carefully at what arguments in the present academic journals are most engaging and decide how best to capitalize on them. This means we can be truly revolutionary without a revolution, except perhaps one against complacency. As you have guessed, I stand in respectful opposition to our comrades who propose that our folklore scholarship requires a massive shake-up, but largely because I do not think a shake-up is realistic. A revolution can mean several things beyond a paradigm shift, and I like the idea of interpreting it as a substantial and satisfying amount of articles written by several scholars engaged in discussion over text and theory throughout many journals.

Let me illustrate what I mean by reference to two works whose subject matter poses very interesting questions to folklorists if we are willing to respond. The first is an interesting critique of postmodernism within the academy by David Simpson, *The Academic Postmodern and the Rule of Literature: A Report on Half-Knowledge* (1995). The second is an almost ethereal trip through postmodern thought and a critique of deconstructionism by filmmaker Michael Roemer, *Telling Stories: Postmodernism and the Invalidation of Traditional Narrative* (1995).

Simpson's argument is both compelling and controversial. Put simply, it is that literary criticism provided the traditional set of terms for the entire academy to speak about postmodernism (1995:1); hence, every discipline that has engaged in postmodern analyses owes its seemingly new perspective to an importation of ideas from literary criticism, and with this importation comes a sizable number of problems for each host discipline. Simpson's critique of the *Western Folklore* 52 articles mentioned above would no doubt be radically different from the

ones posed in *The Folklore Historian*, because his target is in many ways all academic disciplines. Of the seeming change that took place in academia while we twenty-something graduate students were growing up, fighting acne, and looking for things to put on our college resumes, Simpson suggested:

What can look like a completely new configuration of knowledge can also be understood rather more modestly as a result of the exporting of literary categories into disciplines that had previously resisted them by being more confident of the sufficiency of their own. This confusion is encouraged by the rhetoric of the postmodern and about the postmodern, which indeed, as Frederic Jameson tells us, "looks for breaks" and imagines that, for instance, "the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good." In other words, when we say or imply that, for example, the world does not provide us with a foundational reality, or that we live within the realm of spectacle, or that it is impossible to authenticate any form of knowledge as truth...we are indeed trying to make a good-faith statement about the way the world now seems to be; but we are also (most of us) speaking from within an institution (the academy) in some parts of which these insights are familiar to the point of being banal. (1995:2)

The banality of which Simpson spoke is, of course, found when disciplines to which these new ideas have just found a vogue re-export them back to literary critics. As Simpson then argued, "When enough disciplines are prepared to agree on a common vocabulary, as has happened with the migration of literary-critical priorities into other fields, then it is very tempting to propose that the world has indeed changed" (2-3). His objective is therefore to chart the internal migration of these ideas within the academy and to illustrate how academics have in so many cases mistaken that process of migration for an alteration in the world outside of the Ivory Tower.

Time and time again, Simpson took recourse to, among others, John Guillory's analysis of the literary canon, *Cultural Capital* (1993). Guillory's book itself is an application of three things: Pierre Bourdieu's work, Veblen's notion that the social function of an academic in the humanities is his or her very uselessness (and if applied to folklore, it suggests we are not alone in having to justify our existence), and Gouldner's idea of the "new class" of technocrats and professors. In the debate about the postmodern, Simpson recognized the rehearsal of the question of an intellectual's relationship to the public sphere, the same question that, albeit in nascent form, crops up time and time again over email here at the Folklore Institute. And in this belief that our academic perception of the world is harmonized with reality, Simpson saw a potential (and serious) fallacy: "We are indeed responding to the world, but there is no guarantee that our habits and inherited models give us a clear image of it" (1995:11).

His critique complicates our task here, to say the least. How are we to interpret the turn taken by our mentors, and the debate framed over the balance of theory and material, as well as theory and practice, if we accept Simpson's argument, which is of course not his alone?³⁷ And if we do not agree with him, how do we counter and debate such an argument as folklorists? For indeed here, we are best able to make a counter if we admit that a certain tendency toward practice, be it radical politics or at least the idealism that we can really change the world,³⁸ has always marked our discipline. Consider the possibilities. How fruitful it would be if folklorists responded in full to such an argument. It would demonstrate our place at the forefront of academia without an apology for being there.

More importantly, Simpson's discussion of the role of ethnography and anthropology à la Clifford Geertz and James Clifford will resonate deeply in many of us. "Everyone is telling stories," Simpson asserted (1995:22), and some major evidence for his argument is the recent "return of the storyteller" in anecdote and autobiography. Although the traditional genres of folklore are not included, certainly the general theme of an interest in narration as a new paradigm in academia strikes a chord. In reading his description of this academic phenomenon, I cannot help but think of Sandy Dolby's inspiring charge that literary folkloristics, as an integrative methodology that engages performance theory, deconstructionism, and reader-response theory, "serves as an antidote to the nihilistic perspective" of pure deconstructionism (1989:8). It is perhaps true that Simpson's idea of narrative and storytelling is not necessarily the one we folklorists think of first, but I see no reason why we should shy away from discussion on the nature of narrative itself, unless we are unwilling or unable to engage in the debate. Certainly, we should see such discussion as somewhat outside the realm of our concern with folkloric texts, but as a general intellectual discussion about the role of a scholar, I think there are none better to contribute to it than we.

Following Adorno, Simpson wondered whether the turn to storytelling in postmodernism is a "symptom of ideology, of false consciousness" (1995:27), and his concern for this turn in relation to general theory is illuminating for a more complete discussion of our earlier history, especially the reflexive turn in folklore:

For, of course, it is often by way of a confession or advertised acceptance of one's limits that the storytelling genre is elected, only then to permit passage to unskeptical narrativization. Precisely because I can no longer confidently offer the grand theory, the master narrative, the outline of the social-historical totality, I resort to telling about myself as an individual, or as a representative of a small subculture, or as the maker of the history I transcribe. But having admitted this much by way of cautionary prologue, I am unstoppable! (28–29)

And in this turn from grand narrative to personal accounts, he saw the central question for contemporary academics: "At issue here, among other things, is the question of the relation between the world we inhabit and the way we theorize it or represent it" (30). Does this charge not call out for folklorists to counter, or to embrace, or to folkloricize with a hammer? I believe that Simpson's critique, whatever we independently may think of its conclusions, adds some perspective to our current situation. We may respond to it as folklorists, but what does that mean exactly? Does that mean as theorists, as ethnographers, as social activists, as cultural critics? What I mean to suggest is that if these issues are at the heart of our current interests, then the complexity they create initially sets us against ourselves. To put it in another way, the worst of this means that there *really* is a debate between the materially-oriented and the theory-oriented in our field, between theorists and ethnographers, between realist ethnographers and confessional ethnographers, and these debates are going on *within all of us* as consumers of postmodern academia.

There is another way to frame this problem of consciousness we face. In Simpson's discussion of the turn from grand narratives to little ones in anthropology and other ethnographic sciences (for those of you who are wondering, he never mentioned folklore as a discipline, although he did address the idea of folk as icon) (156), he turned to Geertz. Examining Geertz's views on the "relationship between detail and theory" on the micro-level (122) (and here we see more clearly the connection of Simpson's argument to the contextual turn in folklore and to our own dilemma in determining to what we young folklorists are committing ourselves), Simpson noted the anthropologist's conviction that "universals are either implausible or trivial," to which he responded: "Not all generalities need be forceless; it is the antitheoretical climate of academic postmodernism that can allow the writer to ignore the interesting or potentially useful ones" (128).

Simpson's comments about the antitheoretical climate of postmodernism need to be contextualized, or at least cleverly misread. The antitheoretical stand is against general theories and universals; that is, he demonstrated postmodernism's attention to the local, to the micro-level, even with respect to theory. Thus he concluded:

My case, then, is that literary criticism and its methods as traditionally expounded and more recently exported into neighboring disciplines is not so much a solution as a symptom of the problem. That does not, of course, make it worthless. But insofar as we passively replicate its long-standing tirade "against theory" and, by frequent association, against theorization, then we are certainly not in a learning mode!

Significantly, the great ethical crises of our times that have visible international dimensions—torture, genocide, clitoridectomy, immiseration—manage to impinge upon our minds without seeming to trigger any collectively articulated response. (133)

How does this critique fit into the history of the crisis in folklore mapped above? Who, we may ask, are the real critics of theory—the postmodernists who presumably keep to theory on the micro-level or the materialists who admonish an overemphasis on theory? And how would each respond to a criticism such as Simpson's?

Gregory Schrempp has pointed out a similar problem in folklore and anthropology in a brief essay, "Comparative Study and the Scholarly Conscience" (a *Folklore Forum* "Open Forum" essay, by the way). The antagonists in his presentation are the perennial pugilists, historical particularists in one corner and social generalists in the other. As he saw it, there is a sizable error in reading a generalizing theoretical work on the level and by the standards of particulars. Schrempp wrote:

While I (like many others, I suspect) have never fully resolved this dilemma, one part of the resolution must lie in the recognition that there is such a thing as a *theoretical* work, the goals of which are not in all respects coterminous with that of a concrete particularistic history. This is not to imply that the former type of work is excused from getting the *facts* right; rather, it is to call attention to the existence of the several levels of concern in theoretical works. (1988:227–28)

Hence, any essentially theoretical work judged by particular concerns alone will loom deficient, and inappropriately so (228). Schrempp's solution will no doubt appeal to us all:

A more profitable way of looking at the relation between the theoretical and the particularist endeavor would be as an ongoing dialogue, with each participant sensitive to the methods, goals, potentials, and limitations of the other—and willing to try to inform judgments in light of these. (229)

I have brought these problems to the fore to demonstrate how murky the waters are that we cross as younger folklorists. We who will inherit these debates have to do our best navigating them, and I hope I have shown their terrible complexity. But the complexity is one that demands our attention and our own debate. I too have serious concerns about the balance between the micro- and macro-level of what I study. In practical and philosophical terms, how exactly do I as a scholar connect the study of worldview (a study in generalities) with that of communication and performance (a study in

particulars) when the two have different intellectual heritages, scopes, and objectives? I think the success of a work like Bauman's *Let Your Words Be Few* (1983b) cannot be underestimated, for in many ways it offers one model of how to do this in folklore. Moreover, the current vogue of interest in myth, that is viewed sometimes as worldview/ideology and sometimes as discourse/rhetoric, may offer us another site for integrative discussion of the intersection between these ways of theorizing about folklore. I am certainly partial in saying this, but perhaps myth may save us after all.

But here once again, let me articulate another issue that we inevitably face. Just as the balance between the materials of folklore and the theoretical interpretations of it are easier to commit to verbally than in deed, so too are the balanced tensions between generalities and particulars. It is perhaps the folklorist's way to frame the ancient question of the One and the Many, and if done poorly, may lead through its complexity to a deeper sense of fragmentation and confusion about what we are here to be trained to do, rather than to a deeper sense of integration. I hope in highlighting the issue, we will find strategies to deal with the risks adequately.

Let me offer my own critique of some of my friends and colleagues whose work I admire tremendously. I have noticed that in the recent past discussions have popped up here and there regarding a possible paradigm shift in our discipline toward "meaning" in the folkloric phenomenon. Although I am greatly encouraged by this topic and the generally sober and intellectually stimulating way it has been discussed, I think we would be remiss to argue that "meaning" belongs solely to the macro-level of folklore analysis. If we adhere to such an interpretation (and I do not think we will if this conversation continues), I fear we will get stuck in the jam of overarching Theory. In other words, I don't think that emphasis on meaning will enact a swing back to generalities as a significant disciplinary shift. For one thing, the idea of a turn to meaning is not new, although it may seem so to many of us searching for some clarification today.

In 1986, Lauri Honko edited a collection of papers for *Arv*, that were originally read at the 1984 Congress for the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, the topic of which was *The Quest for Meaning in Folklore*. Honko argued that folklore studies on meaning were virtually non-existent well into the late 1970s, but soon became a hot topic in Europe (thanks largely to a visit by Dundes), along with a concern for native interpretations as opposed to analytic ones, that is between real and constructed meanings. Dundes himself had prefigured this concern as early as 1966 in his article "Metafolklore and Oral Literary Criticism," but the attention to native interpretation certainly situates itself comfortably within the general move toward the local that went along with postmodernism. Thus, the article by Thomas DuBois on "Native Hermeneutics: Traditional Means of Interpreting Lyric Songs in Northern Europe" in last year's *Journal of American Folklore* reflects the maturation of this idea. But even DuBois noted that:

Whereas scholars of the past could envision a single "right" version of any given tale or song, latent or garbled in present performances but awaiting careful reconstruction, folklorists today find form and meaning far more contentious and multiple. Both form and meaning rest, in our theories today, not with any single text. (1996:235)

Two other important collections of articles in the 1980s signaled a renewed interest in the idea of meaning, *Journal of Folklore Research* 20/2–3 (1983) and 22/1 (1985). Not surprisingly, two of those responsible for the contextualist turn in folklore theory (Dundes and Ben-Amos) added significant discussions to these on meaning, noting regularly and at the most basic level of argument that meaning cannot be divorced from the context of the item's performance. Thus, all three of these journals provide an historical base upon which younger scholars may frame our current, growing discussion about the meaning behind the folkloric phenomenon, one that I hope we will nourish and let thrive.

This discussion about meaning leads me to the second book I wanted to discuss, *Telling Stories: Postmodernism and the Invalidating of Traditional Narrative*. Roemer's analysis is penetrating and broad and his style is deceptively inviting; it is a book that seduces, quite unlike Simpson's. But it is important to note that by "traditional narrative," Roemer meant something like those stories composed before the advent of postmodernism in the arts, or as he said it, "an encounter with the incomprehensible" (1995:49). Thus, he placed *Märchen* beside Elizabethan drama, something that is certain to raise the eyebrow of a folklorist or two. His notion of myth, for example, often means ancient literature, and his idea of fairy tales may tend toward well-known literary renditions. Thus, Snow White and Romeo and Juliet are cousins as are Little Red Riding Hood and Cordelia (3, 207). In fact, Roemer's contention is resistant to those who would bifurcate what is a traditional genre of folklore from pre-postmodern stories;³⁹ the real split between narrative forms (film included), he argued, is largely a product of the *critics* of traditional stories, not the audiences.⁴⁰

Roemer's main idea about these traditional narratives is encapsulated in his poignant first sentence: "Every story is over before it begins" (3). In engaging a traditional narrative, we listeners or readers know what will happen before we engage the text: "Despite our knowledge, we...worry about Snow White, and hope against hope that Romeo and Juliet will escape their fate" (3). Much of Roemer's work is an analysis of the reasons we engage in these traditional narratives and of how postmodernism's antinarrative stand reputedly threatens them, such as by countering the audience's traditional expectations (139).⁴¹ Against this perspective, Roemer set out to challenge certain aspects of

postmodernism by arguing that traditional stories are not so one-sided, but are indeed complex mediations between affirmation and negation; postmodernism is guilty of this same dual embodiment, despite its claims.⁴²

Roemer's suggestions would intrigue folklorists, and I do not think his concern with postmodern art (indeed a bit different from postmodern academia, the postmodernism against the postmodernity in Dorst's discussion, above) is far from our own interests. For example, Roemer suggested that in everyday life we think we are free from context (12), and through his main argument against postmodernism he countered the idea held by so many folklorists—if even unconsciously—that traditional stories such as myths confirm cultural assumptions (32–33). Certainly this is ground for response, as is so much of his thought provoking work.

With respect to theory, Roemer situated its purpose not completely in opposition to art, but somewhere on the other side of the scale, or as he argued: "Art is not disabling, though, by accommodating opposites, it undermines all simple, clear-cut directives. But *theories* intend to enable us" (168). And here is a central concern for him, for he saw modernism as a largely artistic process, and postmodernism as a largely academic one (365). This in turn fuels the confusion brought upon by the way the world works today:

The realm we inhabit today is vast and the pace at which things happen has accelerated enormously. In 1913, the futurist Marinetti spoke of "the earth shrunk by speed"; more recently, Buckminster Fuller called our world a global village, and McLuhan claimed, optimistically, that "the electronic age returns us to...a reacheived intimacy." One wonders. For though distant places have become instantly accessible to us, we can hardly call our relationship to them "intimate." Meanwhile, the realm we actually inhabit has become unfamiliar and subject to rapid change. Our interconnectedness and interdependence have robbed us of the confidence that we can understand and control our lives. (355)

In this description, I wonder how many of us who have committed ourselves to folklore see a reflection of a similar problem, one in which we imagine the folkloric phenomenon—the stuff of folklore as well as the heart—as a response to this modern problem of isolation and survival in a chaotic world.⁴³ But Roemer made the point very clearly, that the confusion of these things on the academic scale has been our own doing, a game we play because we are in effect able to play it as members of an elite culture. We academics are haunted Positivists, he claimed (372), clinging to the belief that we have "an ability to better the lot of humankind at home and abroad" (361), a belief which Simpson, following Bourdieu, saw as another major fallacy of our roles as scholars.

Here, then, is the importance of Roemer's discussion on postmodernism and tradition. As a part of the postmodern tradition, it is reflexive and turns its attention to the doings of academics who construct their world via academia despite claims to the contrary. And in doing so, his discussion and works like it challenge us who have just begun to learn the tools of our trade, the theories that guide them, and the materials that those theories address. Roemer passionately noted that everywhere except in academia, the individual needs to be revalidated, not undermined (363). How are we to respond?

We need, I believe, to articulate very carefully our visions of folklore (as material, as theory, as method) vis-a-vis our own generation, that undoubtedly perceives the world (that is, both academia and whatever else there is) in a much different way than even those predecessors who are quite sympathetic to our cause. Of course, we must locate ourselves in relation to those mentors and friends who have set the stage with their work, upon which we will build our own. But I think there is growing concern for the things that make our generation unique, both as scholars and as human beings in contemporary American society.

Let me provide an example of what I mean, and in doing so engage one of the well established folk. I have at several times throughout this essay described potential sites of confusion for us graduate students in folklore, and I hope my articulation of those sites has served the purpose of clarification rather than obfuscation. But what about that feeling of uneasiness, of being pulled in at least two directions, of fragmentation and uncertainty that I suggest those sites create? Guillory's work on cultural capital provides one guiding answer to this situation, although it may not sit well with many of us. For Guillory addressed the "certain anxiety associated with the perceived disunity of contemporary society" (1993:34); compare my earlier discussion of crisis rhetoric in folklore. Against the nostalgia for community that this anxiety breeds, and to no small degree critical of the meaning behind critiques of the canon, he asserted that the real question is not whether new cultural unities based on gender, race, or ethnicity demonstrate regular behavior in groups:

But whether the concept of "community" accurately names the site and mode of operation of these cultural regularities. The absence of any other concept in the present debate for describing the site of culture represents a serious defect in the sociological vocabulary of liberal pluralist discourse, a poverty that is especially evident if we were to invoke the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* introduced long ago by Ferdinand Tonnies in his 1887 study of that name. (34)

Modern liberal pluralism, Guillory argued, pays no attention to *Gesellschaft*, and "hence it is unable to describe the political effect of any form of association which does not entail the assumption of cultural unity, or 'community.'"⁴⁴ His opinion of this conscious turn away from

modernity (and the processes that “actually complicate the existence of communities”) is harsh: “Our postmodern tribalism does not make these conditions disappear” (35).

In other words, according to Guillory, the very plurality of theoretical voices that postmodernism brings, and which likely became the answer to the academic crisis of folklore in the 1970s, has at its roots a misconceived and misdirected overemphasis on the local. Guillory’s objective in *Cultural Capital* is an analysis of class as the primary vehicle for canon creation; so it comes as no surprise that he should bemoan a lack of interest in *Gesellschaft*. But his critique returns us once again to the question of the One and the Many, the universal and the particular, and I hope it calls us to arms. For if we follow Guillory’s analysis to its end, then perhaps the turn to contextualism and the subsequent embrace of postmodern theories that characterized folklore in the 1970s and 1980s has indeed led us into a quagmire. If so, how then do we address our own academic concerns in this new period of sharpened self-consciousness?

Before we launch into any pessimist rhetoric about our new crisis in folklore, I would like us to turn to Thomas Kuhn for another perspective on this problem. I promise to leave talk of crisis behind after this brief stop. Kuhn noted that like artists, “creative scientists must occasionally be able to live in a world out of joint—elsewhere I have described that necessity as ‘the essential tension’ implicit in scientific research” (1996 [1962]:79). If we read “folklorists” for Kuhn’s creative scientists, I think we may find another way out of our feeling of uneasiness. For Kuhn insisted that scientists never renounce the paradigms that lead them into a crisis (77). And although he saw in the case of scientific paradigms a change from one to the other without continuity (something that does not hold in the history of folklore, in which scholarship often builds on the former, except in certain cases such as social evolutionism and the like), his description of their response to periods of dilemma is encouraging:

Confronted with anomaly or with crisis, scientists take a different attitude toward existing paradigms, and the nature of their research changes accordingly. The proliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything, the expression of explicit discontent, the recourse to philosophy and to debate over fundamentals, all these are symptoms of a transition from normal to extraordinary research. It is upon their existence more than upon that of revolutions that the notion of normal science depends. (91)

We, the new wave of folklorists, have many issues to work out, to debate within and among ourselves. And we have many ways of situating ourselves within the postmodern world, that is our reality as academics,

and perhaps even more importantly our reality as twenty-and-thirtysomethings. In looking at Guillory and Kuhn, we find different paths of interpretation, whose objectives are no doubt different, but useful in this context. Which will we choose?

Whither To? Some Possibilities

One of the most important things we younger folklorists can do for one another, I believe, is to articulate the places where we see room for folklore's expansion, both in terms of material and theory. Very often this may suggest that we return to our roots, and I welcome discussion on the best methods to do that. Personally, I find a solidly done comparison of an international tale type as appealing as a discourse on the nature of symbolic violence. I know we all strive to do both equally well.

Do we need great debates in folklore, and with scholars in other fields? I am not certain, and I would very much enjoy the opinion of my colleagues on this subject. In my own estimation, I think there are still many places and theories for us to explore, and in doing so we may bring to light certain ideas that have had relatively little attention in our discipline so far. Allow me to give an example from my own academic interests.

Although I have addressed postmodernism to a great extent in the past two sections, I must admit that one of my primary interests lies generally outside the realm of theories defined as postmodern. I have noticed that there seems to be a rising tide of works done on folkloric themes or traditional narratives from scholars in the general field of cognition. In the past few years, for example, three very interesting books have come out that address folkloric issues: *Memory in Oral Tradition: The Cognitive Psychology of Counting-Out Rhymes, Ballads and Epic* by David Rubin (1995), *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning* by Bradd Shore (1996), and *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* by Stuart Vyse (1997). There are certainly many more out there, but these three will illustrate my meaning. As you might expect, folklorists are not mentioned or mentioned only in passing in all three works. Is this the inadequate attention to folklore of which we hear so much these days? Perhaps, but let us be fair to ourselves. This entire discussion is relatively new on the academic sphere,⁴⁵ at least in the way it is taking shape. The opportunity stands for us to enter the fray. The problem is not that these psychologists and cognitive scientists were unaware of folklore's work when they wrote their books. The problem, as I see it, lies only if we do not jump in and complicate matters in the most beneficial ways.

We have our models and much groundwork has been done. From El-Shamy's thoroughly provocative dissertation ("Folkloric Behavior: A Theory for the Study of the Dynamics of Traditional Culture," 1967) and work with what he calls the Brother-Sister Syndrome, to Georges's work on behaviorism, to the connections with developmental psychology made by so many of our teachers in the earlier parts of their careers, the framework is well established. And recently, Schrempp has launched an important critique of some cognitive scientists who have themselves pursued a particular definition of folk as inferior knowledge ("Folklore and Science: Inflections of 'Folk' in Cognitive Research," 1996). Schrempp's method no doubt appeals to our generation because it both advances an issue we find extremely important and does so through a particularly ironic twist, namely by designating these cognitive scientists as a folk group themselves.

I have presented this general issue of cognition as only one, very dear issue to my own hopes for research. I could have easily pointed out the roads we folklorists may pave doing integrative studies of myth or ideology. All three of these issues raise concerns for both the text-oriented and the context-oriented (a distinction I do not like but which makes sense here), those doing worldview and those studying performance, the macro- and micro-level. The list of other contributors to this potential area of debate is too long to discuss here, but my point is that it is not only with respect to cognition that folklorists may engage new theoretical grounds. We need only consider John Searle's recent *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995) to find, for example, a philosopher treading on our ground. Why not respond? If we are truly worried about being marginalized as a discipline, do we have any excuse to pass on opportunities where we may enter the discussions at the forefront of academia?

More importantly, I encourage my fellow graduate students to teach me, and to show me the roads of research they have found; for in sharing these ideas, rather than keeping them safely stored away for ourselves, we may find the beginning of a new wave, and a means for our generation to ride out through our strength whatever crisis is in vogue. We will toy with many ideas over the long course, so let us start trying them now. That to me seems to be the best thing about *Folklore Forum*: a place to test the interest our community shares with our scholarly ideas.

In doing so, that is in requiring ourselves to discuss the implications and manifestations of our epistemology and methodologies, and in demanding the best articulation of these theoretical positions as possible, I believe that we can emphasize a truly integrative approach to folkloric phenomenon. The ultimate goal of any sophisticated theoretical stance is that proper (and indeed minimal) reliance on theory that emerges when we better understand how (especially latent) theoretical constructs affect what we do, and how

discussion of these issues can better bring together theory and practice, ethnography and analysis, fieldwork and interpretation, through the process of what my friend Liz Locke has justly called the time-honored art of speculation. I really do think it is a mistake to ask too many big questions. We also need to understand what a big question truly is, and most of those I have cited above are not overwhelming when handled with a bit more reserve than I provide them here.

This is also why I generally object to those meetings thrown by my colleagues on "the future of folklore," that basically comes back time and time again to talking about jobs, and usually just the job prospects of the graduate students who throw these things. I do not think we graduate students need to be stirred by the thrill of a self-imposed, self-perpetuating crisis, especially at the expense of scholarship. Honesty here will certainly help. Rhetoric aside, let us be frank about our motives in justifying folklore, be they interest in social reform, the unpredictability of the job market, or the thrill of one's ego shining before a sympathetic public. Since Bourdieu, it's acceptable to admit to our competitions for sustained reputation, a process that itself confers status and the power of legitimization. It is the real reason I wrote this damn piece, and we all know it. And I think the graduate students among us who can't seem to enjoy a refractory period between mini-crises ought to come clean about this addiction as well.

Let me put it this way. Ritual salvation is enticing, but not every month. Ritual rebellion is interesting, but not every year. So please, enough pint-size solutions to pint-size problems. It's the tedium that is killing us; some of our perennial graduate student questions may just be plainly dull. And I know we are a tolerant bunch and are expected by each other to be a tolerant bunch, but I hope our tolerance does not lead us headlong into bad faith.

Here's an example taken from a situation in the news as I write this essay. When the article in last October's *Lingua Franca* came out (1997),⁴⁶ I couldn't put my signature quickly enough on the response written by Locke. The piece was superbly crafted, eloquent, passionate, articulate and—most importantly—appropriate to the context. It was a damn fine letter-to-the-editor in response to an article that had some serious defects in representation (unfortunately the letter was significantly changed by the editors of *Lingua Franca*). The eighty plus names that went with it testify to its appropriateness, but also to the short-lived nature of the problem. In the past week, with an article in *Time* magazine⁴⁷ taking a shot at folklore, emails have been surmounting as they always do, and calls have gone out for another letter-to-the-editor. But that's precisely the problem of ritualization. We don't need to establish a group of watchers to police every little comment made about our discipline nor respond as a rogue army to every word of bad press. The *Lingua Franca* letter was a powerful message. Nit-picking everywhere else is just simply

vain. It's also grossly ignorant of the historical dimension to our crisis, and our periodic run-ins with the media. And who has time for it with so much serious scholarship to get done?

And if we are searching for a community of scholars, we need look no further. We all know it: folklore is secondary to no discipline. Although I was unable to attend, I am told by responsible sources that the mood at this year's AFS meeting was a positive one, a sense that we will go out and get things done. There's no better time for it, and I hope we in the younger generation will cultivate the art of conversation with our past, our teachers, and ourselves.

The "Problem" with Popular Culture

Throughout this essay, I have referred many times to my audience as my generation. It is perhaps unfair for me to wait until the close of the article to identify that audience; nevertheless, by my generation I mean those children of Baby Boomers who are now in their late teens, twenties, and early thirties, those of us who were in diapers or grade school when *Toward New Perspectives* was published. Others of course are welcomed generously to this conversation. My point in bringing up my generation is that I do not believe I am truly qualified to speak as a folklorist, engaged with others who have set the stage before me, until I articulate my own location in academia vis-a-vis my generation. And here, I think the popular culture/folklore dichotomy poses the greatest generational gap between us and our professors.⁴⁸ If that is the case, why hide it? We may do better negotiating the concerns of each if we are honest about it now.

Of course, this means more than a discussion between the folklore-cultural studies relationship, although we need to applaud our colleagues at Bowling Green for leading us on that issue. It is also much more than the recognition that our discipline as a whole has shifted from an emphasis on tradition to an emphasis on traditionalizing. All of these are important, but not what I mean in pursuit of a certain integrity to our future work through admitting our relationship with pop culture. Part of what I mean is the need to discuss what is relevant to our generation and what no longer is, and to argue the merits of these generational changes in order to critique our own abilities, ideologies, and hidden agendas.

Take the very concept of folk itself. In 1978, the ethnomusicologist Charles Keil saw nothing more in the term than the construction of a bourgeoisie ideology at work. Keil's statement about the subject is astonishingly refreshing, regardless of where you stand on the issue:

Long study of folklore and folklorists has convinced me that there never were any "folk," except in the minds of the bourgeoisie....There

is something to be said for this doubly magical process that allows the bourgeoisie to become part-time and professional folk themselves. As always, the pros do it better. Sixteen or sixty-four tightly rehearsed whirling couples in matching costumes are certainly a lot more impressive than a bunch of shit-kicking villagers wearing whatever it is that villagers actually wear these days...Wait! Can't we keep "the folk" concept and redeem it? No! and no! (1978:263-64)⁴⁹

Now twenty years later, our generation may find itself asking a question heard many times before, but with a completely new meaning: who are the folk? We know who they were; we know who they are for many of our mentors whose work we esteem highly; but the difference between a graduate student as a member of an elite class and someone flipping burgers at McDonald's is not as easy to accommodate any more, because they're often the same thing, at least here in Bloomington. Is it possible that "folk" as a designate may become completely irrelevant within a relatively short period of time? We need to consider these types of things, and their ramifications on our scholarship as a whole. I think we would benefit from Roger Abrahams's advice:

Obviously, how we define folklore has an important effect on the way we practice the discipline. For this reason, it seems important to reconsider periodically the meanings of "folklore" and of other central terms of the discipline such as "oral transmission," "tradition," and "folk." Not that it should be necessary to arrive at definitions shared by all folklorists; that would be both impossible and intellectually stultifying. Rather, we should seek to understand more fully the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches to the materials basic to our discipline. (1972:16)

It is true that we could easily beat these ideas to death if we merely replace "the future of folklore" rhetoric with an equally compulsive series of "the definition of such-and-such" meetings; we folklorists are still often possessed, I think, by what Roger Welsch called "some definitional demon" (1968:262),⁵⁰ and although I sincerely hope we begin to argue out these classic questions of folklore, I hope we do not do it for the sake of argument alone.⁵¹ In this, I say we entertain Glassie's encouraging idea:

Definitions can set limits or they can highlight centers. Intelligently, we have never defined what definition meant, and while seeming to talk about boundaries which when established would render one thing folk and another not, our hearts have lay more in the work of defining a center, of giving definition to an enduring idea. That idea had always engendered argument and has never yielded any conclusions. And that is right. Arguments over the definition of folklore are not like arguments

over the boiling point of water. No instrument can test their accuracy, no artificial rules can silence them. Each generation must state the definition anew, debate it afresh, because folklore's definition is not factual and free of value. Its virtue is that it is charged with values, saturated with opinions about how one ought to live in the world. (1983:127)

If I have read him correctly, Glassie's statement encourages us to challenge our teachers and to challenge ourselves. And if there's anything truly revolutionary among us, I think it's coming when we stop letting other generations interpret us. Yes, there are skilled and inspiring semioticians like Blonksy, Eco, and Calabrese, who know quite well our contemporary culture's lust to consume various fractal dimensions and its concurrent obsessions with obscurity, Madonna, and channel surfing. But if Guillory's generation fetishized mass culture, then we perfected the process, and the time is near for us to claim it as our own. Of course, this means we have to stop trying to be copies of our mentors, and start making critiques of ourselves.

This would only make sense. For I really do think we understand the rapidly changing world differently from those who are older than we. Some of us actually care, for example, that Sublime is more than an aesthetic condition, and Live is more than a state of being. We comprehend the concept "super-jaded." And this week alone, the band Smash mouth captured in essence everything I have said in this tedious essay.⁵² And all of that's just a small piece of the music end of the business, three pauses between commercials. I applaud our "jadedness" to no small degree, because I sense the very subtle irony behind it that the older folk just don't get, or don't get in the same way, mistaking it for flippancy. If there is a search for meaning in our generation, then it seems to haunt that irony and to exist in spite of the brand of angst we're cashing in on these days. We, as scholars and as folklorists, had best come to grips with that irony very quickly and very honestly, or show our pretension for the scam it is.

Conclusion

As I announced in the opening, this is an essay that did not have to be written and that did not have to be read. For those of you who were courteous enough to follow this winding and long path along with me, I hope I have provided some things to ponder, some clarifications, and some calls to action. I hope I obfuscated only where I intended. I thank you for your patience and look forward to your response.

Let's end our discussion on a positive note, and in doing so turn to Hymes's Presidential Address once again. Professor Hymes said these words around the time I had just learned to speak, and I admire them for their honesty and faith in our mission through every twist of the continuous crisis in folklore:

Succinctly put, folklorists believe that capacity for aesthetic experience, for shaping of deeply felt values into meaningful, apposite form, is present in all communities, and will find some means of expression among all. We do not disdain concert halls, art museums, quiet libraries, far from it—most of us are university scholars and that is part of our life. But our work is rooted in recognition that beauty, form, and meaningful expression may arise wherever people have a chance, even half a chance, to share what they enjoy or must endure. We prize that recognition above fashions or prestige. And we see it as the way to understand a fundamental aspect of human nature and human life. (1975:346)

Notes

I am indebted to my kind friends, colleagues, and teachers who have helped me think this through in recent conversations and who have inspired me with their own dedication to folklore, wherever it may lead them. In particular, I have recent reason to thank Liz Locke, Meagan Hassell, Troy Boyer, Glenn Ostlund, John Roleke, Lisa Gilman, Esther Clinton, Lynn Gelfand, Tracie Wilson, Matt Bradley, Lisa Gabbert, Andy Kolovos, and John “47” Fenn. I would also like to thank Gigi Thibodeau and Todd Avery for general comments about the status of our respected disciplines. I appreciate the advice about certain issues in this essay given to me by Hasan El-Shamy, Sue Tuohy, and Henry Glassie. Above all, I am thankful to my patient wife Rachel, without whom all this is meaningless. All errors in judgment are mine alone.

¹ Dorson described 1949 as the most important “moment of transformation” for folklore in America, followed by his own successful application to grant folklore departmental status in 1963 (1973:163). Stith Thompson retired in 1955, and Dorson took over as chairman on the committee of folklore in 1957 (191). See Georges 1989 for a full discussion of Dorson’s legacy in the creation of the discipline.

² See Zumwalt 1988 for a discussion of the creation of folklore as an academic institution.

³ I should mention Williams’s scathing New Left historical critique of the reorganization of AFS by Thompson, Dorson, and others into a professional organization, by which radical social activist folklorists such as Botkin were pushed out and effectively silenced; therein Williams makes the bold statement referring to AFS that “The potential among professional organizations for thought control is for the most part still unrealized” (1975:233). Dorson 1975 responded to Williams, but since then relatively little has been made of their exchange.

⁴ For example, among others, Utley’s criticism of certain scholars working on myth:

Meanwhile, the poetic aspect of our study is neglected, or handled, to our dismay, by the new mythographers, who rush into the vacuum we have left for them. Like maggots from God-kissed carrion, they generate spontaneously from the New Criticism, a laudable enough matrix if it is recognized for what it is, a genuine defensive of the integrity and totality of the work of art, and a rebellion against positivistic, science-centered blindness. (1952:113)

His ultimate criticism was, however, that these scholars did not really do their homework; e.g., they never read the twelve volumes of the *Golden Bough*, footnotes included. See Baron (1993:237) for a recent assessment of Utley's Presidential Address.

⁵ For a more complete depiction, it would be best to start with Thompson's discussion of "Theories of the Folktale" in *The Folktale* 1977 [1946], an important work in the history of discipline building and certainly related to the problem at hand.

⁶ Dorson's comments about "folklore and church music" were not flippant; they were in fact taken verbatim from an article by Jonathan Spivak in the May 12, 1961 *Wall Street Journal* and repeated in the Senate Report No. 652, *National Defense Education Act Amendment of 1961* (20). On a personal note, I am a bit unnerved to discover that a decade to the day before my own birthday the *Wall Street Journal* published an editorial calling for the elimination of folklore from the NDEA, and ended with the statement: "Take heart, America, apparently our lead in boondoggling is secure" (cited in Dorson 1962:160). Boondoggling, it turns out, is not as advantageous as I originally hoped. Moreover, that was around the day that the Senate cut the one million dollars that led to the abolishment of grants to folklore; one of the leading Representatives against the folklore grants was John Fogarty, then chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, a congressman from my home state of Rhode Island. And you thought we were too small to make trouble.

⁷ As Louis Jones has described him, namely the old and the new (1959:235).

⁸ As he described his own hope for his theory of American folklore: "In my heart of hearts, perhaps, I yearned for a caustic critic—an Andrew Lang tilting at Max Müller or a Joseph Jacobs in turn jabbing at Lang, men who held the British public spellbound for four decades with the virtuosity of their debating skills" (1971:51).

⁹ As Dorson's politics and their legacy would fit well into a description of folklore through Bourdieu's analysis of pedagogic action and authority. Perhaps revisionist histories of his contribution to the field will consider these ideas, and in doing so illuminate several issues about folklore's struggle for legitimacy and folklorists' competition for reputation, that of course continues among us today, perhaps more than we are willing to admit. I mean these comments only to provoke a certain honesty among us, not a hostility.

¹⁰Bruss's book is really an amazing achievement, in which she describes in a lucid and engaging style the changes in attitude toward theory that gripped the Anglo-American world in the 1960s and 1970s, provides an excellent analysis of the constitutional elements and functions of theory, and critiques the habits of academics to ritualize theory.

¹¹Dorson's respondents at AFS included Ronald Baker, Robert Byington, George Carey, Robert Georges, Thomas Green, Ellen Stekert, and Robert Teske (Dorson 1972).

¹²In a plenary session in 1971, "The Academic Future of Folklore"; see Dorson 1972.

¹³It is interesting to read Dorson's comments with Baker's 1971 survey, "Folklore Courses and Programs in American Colleges and Universities," that paints a far more pleasant picture.

¹⁴See Abrahams (1993:382-83) for some recent discussion of Dorson's legacy, including Dorson's tendency *toward* transdisciplinarity, at least in comparison to Thompson.

¹⁵Namely Thomas Adler, Michael Bell, Beth Blumenreich, Eddie Bullard, Gerald Cashion, Robert Cosbey, Neil Grobman, Lee Haring, Tom Ireland, Michael Owen Jones, Kenneth Ketner, John McDowell, Bari Lynn Polonsky, Sharon Sherman, and Jim Stovall.

¹⁶Namely, genre, performance, tradition, situation, and creativity.

¹⁷Simpson continued: "It could be argued that the more *interested* we are, the more wholly we inhabit a subculture, the less we can know about it, owing to our inevitable subservience to the pressures of its operative ideologies" (1995:14).

¹⁸It is important to mention Dorson's 1978 article, "The Folklore Boom, 1977." Dorson noted therein a report in the *Wall Street Journal* (the nemesis of folklore in the 1960s) of 1977 that folklore was one "of two spectacular growth industries in the United States" (1978a:83). The other one was tennis, by the way, whatever that may mean for us. Dorson then aimed to illustrate this boom in folklore, but did so by charting all the events that he himself attended between September 1 and November 7, 1977. Although he praised a "dramatic reversal of folklore's image between 1960 and 1977" and noted Bess Lomax's promise to Indiana University students that year that through public service there would be "more jobs than folklorists" (89) in the future, Dorson did not really make a strong claim for a reversal of fortune, and little reference to this article is made in later assessments.

¹⁹See, for example, W. F. H. Nicolaisen 1983.

²⁰ In centering on Dorson, I have consciously created what George Stocking called a *mythistory*; a discussion of a discipline's history via "archetypification, which characteristically coalesce around nodes of person and of moment" (1989:203).

²¹ Stern 1991 reviewed and critiqued this entire presentation.

²² In my opinion, the single best explanation of postmodernism as it relates to folklore can be found in Pertti Anttonen's article on the subject in *Nordic Frontiers* 1993 entitled "Folklore, Modernity and Postmodernism: A Theoretical Overview." When I refer to postmodernism throughout this essay, I am largely referencing Anttonen's description. See also Warshaver's "On Postmodern Folklore" 1991, which more closely discusses the ways postmodernism challenged Dorson's ideas about theory and folklore.

²³ [For several years in the late 1980s and early 1990s delays in the publication of *Folklore Forum* resulted in situations such as articles citing or printing works dated after the journal issues themselves.—Ed.]

²⁴ Compare Georges 1986, discussion of the ways universal comparisons and cultural relativity can interrelate.

²⁵ In this Oring echoed Georges's contribution to the collection ("Earning, Appropriating, Concealing, and Denying the Identity of the Folklorist," 1991), which calls for defending folklore's disciplinary boundaries.

²⁶ Among them critiques of power, gender, race, context, nationalism, identity, aesthetics, local culture, and representation. The contributors are Roger Abrahams, Robert Baron, Richard Bauman, Dan Ben-Amos, Donald Brenneis, Charles Briggs, Paul Hanson, Deborah Kapchan, Deborah Kodish, Jay Mechling, Margaret Mills, Susan Ritchie, John Roberts, Amy Shuman, and Beverly Stoeltje.

²⁷ This focus on the politics of scholarship has challenged the ways that theories and their applications have heretofore been assessed. Accordingly, not only has a dominant theoretical framework for folkloristics failed to materialize, but the patina is fading rapidly from the quest for all-encompassing theories that attempt to reduce a chaotic and dynamic world to orderly interpretations and restore fixed, coherent meanings. (Shuman and Briggs 1993:115)

²⁸ Alternatively, Bronner told a delightful anecdote that "Folklore has had the longest death in history" (1996:26).

²⁹ We need to consider Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's recent statement carefully:

The solution to our crisis, if indeed there is a solution, does not lie in defending our intellectual tradition or wearing our stigmatized name

as a badge of honor or correcting the misperceptions of what folklore is and what folklorists do. A more radical approach is called for—radical in the sense of going to the root of our intellectual history and disciplinary formation, to the atavism that popular understanding preserves in the notion of folklore as error. (1996:251–52)

³⁰ And of Hand's survey of folklore and its prospects. Largely a search to strengthen the comparative method of historical reconstruction of folkloric materials, Hand's article insisted that "all applications of our work...go well beyond the folklore of our own country, and...inevitably lead to other disciplines for solution. This is why mention was made earlier in this paper of the eclectic character of our work, and of the need to join hands with our colleagues in other fields" (1960:9). I mention this point to illustrate the pervasiveness of two traditions in folklore (the tight-disciplinary and the transdisciplinary) that have existed from the immediate establishment of the academic discipline.

³¹ There is, of course, the critique that by "interdisciplinary," most of us mean attention to only one other theory or complex of theories in only one other field. This is another issue to face, but not here. Thus, I will stick with "integrative" and "transdisciplinary" as the key terms, but I readily recognize the problems those designations bring.

³² El-Shamy has expressed these *viva voce* in a recent History of Ideas course. This concern echoes the one so eloquently argued by Glassie 1994 (itself a response to Oring's concept of identity), that situates a certain empiricism at the core of our work:

Identity, like most folklore matters, is a straightforward empirical problem disguised as a heavy philosophical issue. With identity as our goal we can return to the empirical realm. There are exceptions, of course, but we folklorists are mediocre theorists and mediocre historians. But we are excellent—without peer—in describing the things out there. Note how many of the advances in recent anthropology and history are but steps along our trail. We were pioneers of the postmodern back when it was still called modern. Our great books all bring a centered bricolage of concept into productive association with empirical complexity; they drive us into connection with the world. (1994:241)

Empiricism is of course not without its critics and its philosophical problems, but I think we have in thinking over this issue a genuine concern for making certain our theory is not done in bad faith. Of course, fieldwork lies at the center of this issue, and in writing about theory I do not mean to suggest in any way that fieldwork could or should be made secondary in our discipline. Although I am not certain that I can agree entirely with Oring's idea that fieldwork, as our link with the world, "keeps inquiry from collapsing into theory" (1994b:246), it is only because I do not think theory threatens folkloristic inquiry.

³³ That is, a stand against humanism-as-essentialism in order to achieve humanism-as-egalitarianism. In this respect, postmodern theories direct us to significant concerns with our perception of others and of ourselves. I will argue that we have the feminists among us to thank and to emulate for being the only consistent group of scholars who use theory, for example, to break down the "tunnel vision of folklore" (Young and Turner 1993:10) and address "people outside of meaning itself" (Green 1993:5). In a political atmosphere such as today's, when liberal pluralism has become a simplified scapegoat for the agendas of so many inside and outside the academy, these issues become all the more important for our scholarship and for our roles as academics.

³⁴ And I would argue, as Ben-Amos has done repeatedly with respect to context (1972, 1977, 1979, 1993), that these issues do not exclude each other. As the study of context by its very nature studies the text, so must theory in folklore mean plausible interpretation of a text and/or performance. It may be a difference in scope, but I see no reason there should be a theory/materials controversy unless one or both of them are done injudiciously. And I guess, therefore, we should admit it: there are plenty of bad theorists out there.

³⁵ David Azzolina compiled a list of nineteen journals considered by the Institute for Scientific Information to be the core journals of folklore as a discipline (1983:6-7). It may be worth investigating which of these journals are still of primary importance, and which journals outside of folklore offer the most promise for intellectual debate. A service like this type of list, given to graduate students upon arrival, may be of considerable, practical assistance in planning our necessary publication careers.

³⁶ See for example Ben-Amos (1977:36).

³⁷ Simpson built largely, for example, on the philosophy of Richard Rorty and the anthropologies of Geertz and Clifford.

³⁸ Simpson argued, for example:

I would guess that most of us who are professional intellectuals and teachers of the humanities have had the experience of giving a presentation before students and colleagues in which we have declared ourselves more right-minded and radical than the rest. And I would guess that we have also then had the experience of having our radical claims debunked as overtly or covertly reactionary and conformist by persons in the audience who think that they are far more radical than we are. Sometimes this comes in the form of an explicit counterclaim or rival formulation; sometimes it takes on a more confrontational rhetoric and asks us, in so many words, precisely how we imagine that our ten cents' worth is going to change the world, or affect the folks in Peoria. And the difficulty we have with this sort of challenge indicates, I think, that most of us still do imagine that we are changing the world,

or should be changing the world. Few among us have the confidence to pronounce that the question is irrelevant. (1995:160)

Simpson's alliance with Bourdieu's many ideas on *Homo Academicus* comes through particularly clearly, and raises many questions for folklorists.

³⁹ As Roemer presented, "We think we see differences between myth, in which fate and the gods determine the outcome, and the stories of today, in which people appear to be shaping their own lives. But all stories are over before they begin" (1995:3).

⁴⁰ Even as postmodern theory appears to affirm the existence of the critic, it undermines the individuality of everyone else and challenges the concept of the self that has, traditionally, been the focus of narrative. Since most of us, however, do not suffer the critic's existential anxiety—so close to the artist's own—and lack his intellectual gifts, we retain a traditional view of art and story, and continue, perhaps naively, to seek in them a confirmation of our own identity. (Roemer 1995:139)

Roemer's comments here could be profitably applied to certain issues in folklore, such as the dichotomy between folk and folklorist, and the debate between those folklorists who favor and disfavor postmodern theory.

⁴¹ By "antinarrative," I think Roemer meant a critical position against those things he called traditional narratives, and hence his idea is not inconsistent with the postmodern turn to certain descriptive narrative forms such as anecdote and biography which Simpson highlighted. Moreover, the antinarrative stand Roemer discussed is largely Derrida's, or at least Derridean: "In its valid and necessary drive to change society by casting doubt on essence and reality, we can hardly expect contemporary critical thinking to include its own opposite—traditional story, with its burden of the essential and necessary" (1995:78).

⁴² For example:

Despite its declared intentions, postmodern art continues to affirm the self....Deconstruction, too, may affirm what it undermines. As we have noted, writing—carried out in solitude, and far less open than the spoken word to the immediate influence of others—confirms our identity. As I write, I become continuous....Postmodernism's "attack" on the "unitary subject" may be an inverted attempt to shore it up. Surely it is no accident that America's foremost deconstructionists were once students of Romanticism, with its determined struggle to save the self. Their elaborate linguistic play and the sophisticated reasoning they bring to bear on Western logocentrism establish a peer group of the select, who confirm each other as individuals. (Roemer 1995:138–39)

⁴³ Let us consider, for example, William Wilson's inspiring analysis:

I am convinced that we generate and transmit folklore not because we belong to a particular nation or to a particular group—not because we are Westerners, loggers, Catholics, or Finns—but because we are human beings dealing with recurring human problems in traditional human ways....It is my firm belief that folklore will give us the best picture we can get of our fellow beings struggling to endure. And it is my stronger conviction that we have a duty to use the knowledge we have gained from folklore study, and the skills we have developed, to help each other prevail. (1988:165–66)

⁴⁴Guillory's comments should be read with Oring's article "The Arts, Artifacts, and Artifices of Identity" (1994a) and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's response, "On Difference" (1994), in which she presented a different interpretation of the postmodern folklorist's position toward *Gemeinschaft* (1994:234).

⁴⁵At least in this present manifestation. In fact, during the time of F. Bartlett and the W. Anderson-A. Wesselski debates in the first half of this century, cognitive issues in folklore were very much in the minds of folklorists.

⁴⁶"That's All, Folks!" by John Dorfman. Locke's response, signed by eighty additional graduate students in folklore from all the major North American programs, was published in the Letters to the Editor section in the December/January issue (1997).

⁴⁷"Where the Elite Meet to Be Aesthetes," by Bruce Handy, 11/3/97.

⁴⁸The study of folklorism (*Folklorismus*), currently of greater importance in the European sphere, provides a very useful way to enter this discussion. As Regina Bendix aptly wrote of it:

The concept of folklorism implied first crossing disciplinary boundaries, looking at mass media and popular culture, discussing ideology and, finally, taking a personal stance. It is not surprising, therefore, that many folklorists flatly refused even to enter the discussion. Some European folklorists stepped outside the confines of their discipline, however, opting for participation in what they considered to be the renovation of the field, using the concept of folklorism and all that it comprises...the discussion [of folklorism as it appeared in European folklore] has brought to the fore otherwise tacitly held positions concerning the academic and social role of the discipline, and studying the course of the debate reveals shifts within the discipline as a whole. (1988:5)

In relation to this approach, compare Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's "The Future of Folklore Studies in America: The Urban Frontier" (1983).

⁴⁹Dorson 1978b responded in full to Keil's criticisms, largely agreeing with the sentiment but insisting that the soundness of the discipline mitigated any concerns with the semantic problem of "folk." Keil's reply was no less animated than his first, and he noted that Dorson took the easy way out; he concluded: "Surely there is an academic imperialist tendency at work here, a mystification that turns every group's expressive life and every individual's 'personal experience narrative' into grist for the folklorist's mill" (1979:209).

⁵⁰Welsch's comments were directed in response to a paper given by Ben-Amos at the 1967 AFS meeting entitled "Folklore: The Definition Game Once Again." Welsch continued:

Folklorists grapple with themselves to find a definition and, having found it, grapple with others to defend their new faith with the fervor of converts. Indeed, in the face of attack, they are likely to state their case more strongly, more radically than they themselves actually believe. Like fraternity men who come to realize the idiocy of the system, they continue to defend it to avoid an embarrassing admission of error, and they thereby compound the error. (1968:262)

⁵¹Another approach would be to follow Nicolaisen (1983:91), who asked what the methods and materials of the discipline are by answering Samuel Bayard's three questions on the nature of folklore (originally posed in 1953). Although somewhat outdated, William Bascom asked two basic questions for folklore theory (1977:2). See also Oring's caveat against asking the wrong types of questions (1991:75), and his charge, echoing Dundes to a certain degree, that:

One of the reasons that folklore studies do not hold a prominent place in the humanities or social sciences is that contemporary folklore studies have yet to contribute a major theoretical perspective to the study of human behavior and expression....Of course the absence of original theory in contemporary folklore owes much to the disorganization and fragmentation of the field itself. (78)

⁵²That is, "Twenty-five years ago they spoke out and they broke out of recession and oppression and they toked. And they folked out with guitars around a bonfire, just singin' and clappin'. Man, what the hell happened?...And their kids were hippie chicks or hypocrites" (From the song "Walkin' on the Sun," 1997).

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